

# DIVERSE RESPONSES TO OPEN EDUCATION

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## ASIA

### Diverse responses to open education

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Educators in Asia's diverse higher education sector are increasingly calling for educational resources that are more affordable for students, have undergone stringent quality assurance processes, and are of greater relevance to their local contexts.

One of the pedagogical innovations proposed to address some of these demands is open educational resources (OER) – digital materials that can be legally shared without copyright restrictions or cost to the user.

Since the resources are free to the user, they are more affordable than traditional textbooks. Because they are shared openly, they can be scrutinised by peers, potentially improving the quality of materials produced. And, as they can be created by anyone (including those in niche fields or marginalised communities), they have the potential to create greater opportunities for locally meaningful resources to be shared and enjoyed.

So goes the argument. But do OER deliver on this potential?

To understand whether, how and under what conditions OER adoption occurs in the Global South, the Research on Open Educational Resources for Development (ROER4D) project embarked on a four-year research programme with over 100 researchers in 18 sub-projects across 21 countries in South America, Sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia.

ROER4D recently published its research in an open access edited volume, [\*Adoption and Impact of OER in the Global South\*](#), edited by Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams and Patricia B Arinto. The book includes chapters discussing OER activity in six Asian countries: Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia and Sri Lanka.

The opening empirical study of the book, [“OER use in the Global South”](#) by José Dutra de Oliveira Neto, Judith Pete, Daryono and Tess Cartmill, establishes a baseline of OER activity in South and Southeast Asia, and

across the Global South.

Based on a survey conducted with 295 instructors at 28 higher education institutions in nine countries, their data show that 56% of instructors in South and Southeast Asia had used OER, while 49% of instructors in South America had done the same, and 46% of the African instructors surveyed had done so. This is a modest difference between the regions, but in fact instructors in South and Southeast Asia showed consistently higher comparative rates of OER use, creation and adaptation. They also revealed the lowest amount of uncertainty in terms of understanding the concept of OER.

Of the three Asian countries surveyed, India and Indonesia reported relatively high responses regarding OER use at 70%, compared to Malaysia at just 39%. Thus, while the region compares well to the others in terms of OER use, it is also a complex context with diverse OER adoption patterns.

### **Positive attitudes**

In the chapter [“Higher education faculty attitude, motivation and perception of quality and barriers towards OER in India”](#), Sanjaya Mishra and Alka Singh present their findings on university educators’ perceptions of OER quality and whether their attitudes towards using OER influence how they use and-or contribute open resources.

They found that, despite the relatively low levels of awareness of OER demonstrated by Indian educators at the four universities featured in the study, they were very positive about creating and sharing OER once they learned about the concept.

Many of the educators’ positive attitudes stemmed from the sense of satisfaction they obtained when others used and adapted their work. They saw the process of sharing OER as a useful way to obtain feedback from peers and boost their academic reputation. The sharing process was also viewed as a mechanism for increasing collaborative opportunities and educators believed that their own sharing would encourage others to do the same.

The educators were mildly cautious about OER quality issues, but said that they would use OER if they were appropriate for their needs. They acknowledged a number of barriers to using and sharing OER, including a lack of understanding of intellectual property, copyright and open licensing. They also worried about the current lack of funding, institutional incentives

and support for OER activities.

The authors recommend that advocacy to raise awareness of OER in Indian universities should be a top priority, with a particular focus on teachers and senior administrators. Teachers should be released from certain duties so that they have the time to engage in OER activity. Incentives in the form of awards and-or recognition in promotion should also be provided for teachers to undertake OER development.

Quality assurance mechanisms for OER should be introduced. Lastly, continuous professional development opportunities should be provided to teachers through regular workshops and training sessions on advanced information and communication technologies and OER skills.

### **Cultural-historical factors**

In the chapter, [“Cultural–historical factors influencing OER adoption in Mongolia’s higher education sector”](#), Batbold Zagdragchaa and Trotter investigate the strategies and practices of educators from six public and private higher education institutions in Mongolia in order to understand the role of OER in their work. The study addresses the question of which cultural–historical factors shape OER activities in Mongolia’s higher education sector.

Findings indicate that despite recent efforts on the part of funders and the government to promote OER, awareness remains modest among higher education instructors and administrators. It is therefore not surprising that OER adoption rates in Mongolia are low at the tertiary level.

As a result, a culture around OER engagement has not yet emerged, with only isolated individual educators using and sharing OER. In contrast with many academics who worry about the quality of OER, Mongolian educators appeared more concerned about a particular sub-component of quality: relevance. They were interested in OER insofar as they could be relevant to their highly unique national context.

According to the authors, Mongolia has developed and supported large-scale educational resource projects, especially at the basic education level, and it may need to take a similar proactive stance regarding OER in the higher education sector if it seeks to improve the quality, relevance and cost-effectiveness of teaching content.

As the first study on OER activity in Mongolia’s higher education system, this research has value and application for researchers and advocates

pursuing an OER agenda, for policy-makers seeking to understand how policy interventions might influence OER adoption in the national and institutional context, and for funding agencies aiming to boost educators' OER engagement more broadly.

## **Student teachers**

The chapter, "[Impact of integrating OER in teacher education at the Open University of Sri Lanka](#)", by Shironica P Karunanayaka and Som Naidu reports on a research project implemented in the faculty of education at the Open University of Sri Lanka which investigated the impact of incorporating OER in the teaching and learning process by secondary-level student teachers.

Findings show that the OER changed teachers' instructional resource use, pedagogical perspectives and pedagogical practices. Integration of these resources facilitated a shift from a low to a high degree of innovative use of instructional resources as well as creation of OER by teachers. It also led to a shift in pedagogical perspectives and practices towards more constructivist, context-centric and collaborative approaches, as well as to a participatory sharing culture, in favour of open educational practices.

The research in this book suggests that Asian higher education is already benefiting from OER use in certain contexts, and that it could also be expanded due to the positive feelings that many educators have towards the concept when they are made aware of it.

Despite the fact that a number of challenges remain for Asian educators who wish to use or create OER – such as legal, technical, cultural and pedagogical issues – the ROER4D volume illuminates how these issues shape OER adoption in certain Asian contexts and serves as a baseline of empirical evidence that calls for further research.

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